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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5775  
INFO RUEHSW/AMEMBASSY BERN PRIORITY 1512  
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 8533  
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 1372  
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ NOV 9797  
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 6786  
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 0473  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 1468  
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 7474  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHMFISS/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHMFIUU/FBI WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 004262

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/28/2018  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [KJUS](#) [CO](#)  
SUBJECT: COLOMBIANS MARCH - IN SMALLER NUMBERS - AGAINST  
FARC AND KIDNAPPING

REF: A. 08BOGOTA2647  
[1](#)B. 08BOGOTA4134  
[1](#)C. 08BOGOTA3079

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor David M. Zimov  
Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

[1](#)1. (U) Several thousand Colombians marched through the country's major cities on November 28th to demand the FARC and other illegal armed groups release the hostages they still hold before Christmas. The disappointing turnout was significantly smaller than the millions who demonstrated to release hostages on February 4, and again on July 20, 2008 (Ref A).

[1](#)2. (U) Directors of the groups promoting the marches told the media the low turnout was due to increasing apathy towards the humanitarian exchange issue in the wake of Operation Checkmate ("Jaque"), which freed high-profile hostage Ingrid Betancourt, AMCITs Marc Gonsalves, Thomas Howes, and Keith Stansell, and other Colombian hostages. Organizers said the poor turnout was also the result of torrential rains that recently inundated parts of the country, and to distractions in the wake of the growing financial crisis and recent pyramid-scheme scandals (Ref B). Betancourt called for the marches in October, and reportedly told participants at a concurrent rally in Madrid that she still believes a dialogue with the insurgents is necessary.

[1](#)3. (C) Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo told us Operacion Jaque had taken both international and domestic pressure off the GOC to engage in a humanitarian exchange process with the FARC. The GOC was in no rush to engage with the group until the FARC showed it was serious about releasing hostages and starting peace talks. Leading Invamer-Gallup pollster Jorge Londono told us the recent pyramid crisis and pocketbook issues were moving up in importance on the list of issues that concern Colombians--at the expense of the humanitarian exchange. U Party Representative Nicolas Uribe told us the march turnout was a "disaster." His constituents, he said, were upset that Betancourt did not attend. Also, after numerous recent marches and protests from the indigenous, pyramid scheme victims, and striking workers, the people "were getting sick of marches."  
BROWNFIELD